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RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 4636
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 1867
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 1404
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON 2232
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
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SUBJECT: PROMOTING RELIGIOUS TOLERATION AT A KEY ISLAMIC
SCHOOL

REF: 07 JAKARTA 3468

¶1. (U) This message is Sensitive But Unclassified -- Please
handle accordingly.

¶2. (SBU) SUMMARY: Poloff underscored the importance of
religious freedom and highlighted the positive role played by
Muslims in the United States during a talk at a major Islamic
school in West Jakarta. Pesantren Asshiddiqiyah faculty and
students provided an excellent demonstration of a modern
Muslim education that stresses tolerance and rejects violent
extremism. END SUMMARY.

¶3. (SBU) Poloff spoke January 9 at the main campus of
Pesantren Asshiddiqiyah, an Islamic school affiliated with
the mass-Muslim organization Nadhutul Ulama (NU). The school
has five other branches in Indonesia, including West Java,
Banten and Lampung, and enrolls over 4000 students.
Approximately 600 students study at the main campus, located
in West Jakarta.

¶4. (SBU) RELIGIOUS FREEDOM--GETTING THE WORD OUT: In two
separate sessions, including one held in the Pesantren's
mosque--to accommodate the large crowd--poloff addressed
approximately 300 elementary, secondary and university
students and underscored the following points:

-- The United States is proud of our history of religious
liberty and believes that freedom of religious belief is a
key element of democracy. Muslims are a growing presence in
the United States where they enjoy the same freedoms and
opportunities as every other American.

-- There is no incompatibility between Islam and democracy, a
fact demonstrated by Indonesia's own robust democracy and the
participation of American Muslims in the United States' own
democratic process.

-- The government and people of the United States do not
regard terrorism as an Islamic phenomenon. USG
counterterrorism policies target individuals who use violence
against civilians to achieve political ends, not Muslims as a
group.

¶5. (SBU) In lively question and answer sessions, students
posed a number of excellent queries. Several students asked

about instability and extremism in other parts of the Muslim world. Poloff encouraged them to promote peaceful interfaith dialogue throughout the Muslim world. As a pluralistic, Muslim-majority democracy, Indonesia should stand as a model to other Muslim countries. Students were also especially keen to hear about opportunities for future study in the United States.

¶6. (SBU) A MODERN MUSLIM EDUCATION: Dr. Noer Muhammad Iskandar, the head of Pesantren Asshiddiqiyah and spiritual advisor to former Indonesian president Abdurrahman Wahid, outlined the school's vision of a modern Muslim education. He told poloff that the school aims to produce well-rounded graduates who can compete in the global economy. To that end, the curriculum combines traditional Islamic studies with a rigorous course of "Western" subjects such as math, science and social studies. The school also emphasizes English language skills, a fact amply demonstrated by the English abilities of the students who met poloff.

¶7. (SBU) Dr. Iskandar also explained that Pesantren Asshiddiqiyah sought to produce students who respected the rights of all faiths to live in a religiously pluralistic society. His efforts are clearly paying off as students from Pesantren Asshiddiqiyah helped provide security at Christian churches during the Christmas season (reftel).
HUME